



## **2014 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING PROSPECTS**

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The leading reason many individuals participate in deer hunting is simply the opportunity to spend time outdoors with friends and family, but actually harvesting a deer is still very important to many deer hunters. No amount of hunting guarantees a harvest, but preparation and hard work are keys to producing the best chance to see and take deer, or to mentor a new hunter through a safe and enjoyable season. The 2014 deer season is expected to be a successful year for many hunters, and as always, will certainly offer the exciting challenge we call 'hunting'.

Persistence can pay off for deer hunters. Nationwide, successful deer hunters hunt an average of 18 days – slightly more than the average of about 14 days that Michigan deer hunters spent afield last year. However, chances for success are greatest for those who are prepared. Part of hunting preparations each year includes becoming familiar with the most recent regulations. The deer website of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – [www.michigan.gov/deer](http://www.michigan.gov/deer) – provides highlights of regulation changes, information about deer management, and links to additional resources, such as a list of deer check stations. Please refer to the 2014 Hunting and Trapping Digest and Antlerless Digest, available at DNR Operations Service Centers, license vendors, or available in electronic formats through links at this site, for a map of all Deer Management Units (DMUs) and other regulation details.

Some successful hunting trips are just a result of being in the right place at the right time. Overall, deer activity tends to be highest a few weeks prior to breeding. The peak of breeding activity for Michigan deer generally occurs just prior to the opening of the firearm deer season. These peak breeding dates are earliest in the southern Lower Peninsula, except that many does in the region that were born just this spring will already conceive their first fawns this year. Those breeding events for young does often occur a month or

more later than they do for older deer, often not until mid-December. Hunters often seek to take advantage of these times of high deer movements, so archery hunting activity is often highest in late October and early November, followed by the busiest deer hunting day of the year -- the opening of the firearm season. In southern Michigan, another late period of deer activity can occur several weeks prior to the late breeding events among young does, which can coincide with the end of the firearm season.

### **What to Expect Across the State**

The 2013 season saw a drop in deer harvest in the majority of the Midwestern United States, and Michigan was not an exception. Hunting success decreased somewhat across the state; though a little more than 4 out of every 10 hunters were still able to take home at least one deer last season. The biggest decreases in deer harvest occurred in the upper and southern lower peninsulas. The Upper Peninsula experienced a severe and prolonged winter in 2012, and deer harvest was expected to decline as a result. Areas in the Southern Lower Peninsula were still recovering from the Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease outbreak that occurred in the summer of 2012. More restrictive regulations along with lower than typical deer populations led to fewer antlerless deer in particular being taken in southern Michigan.

The winter of 2013 started early and continued late into spring throughout most of the state. Record low temperatures and above average snowfall made for difficult conditions for deer, most notably in the Upper Peninsula. Some areas may see decreased numbers of fawns and yearlings as a result but overall there appears to be good survival throughout much of the Lower Peninsula regions.

The 2014 deer season is forecasted to have similar success rates to last year. Please see below for more detailed information about the area you hunt and what to expect. Though, this may help to get you started with what to look for there is no substitute for scouting. The opportunity to find out which trees are producing, what deer trails are being utilized and what patterns deer are following this year is priceless information for a deer hunter. So, whether your goal is to get meat in the freezer, go for a wall hanger or simply get outdoors, Michigan's deer seasons offer something for everyone. Best of luck to you hunters and have a wonderful and safe deer season.

### **Upper Peninsula**

The Upper Peninsula (UP) has experienced back to back severe winters over the last two years. This has led to decreased deer numbers throughout the region with losses occurring most notably in this year's fawns and yearlings. Biologists recommended closing all public land and all but three private land deer management units for antlerless licenses this year in order to allow deer numbers to rebound over the next three years. The three units currently open for private land antlerless licenses are located in the south central portion of the UP which typically has higher deer populations than anywhere else in the UP. Antlerless permits are available in Deer Management Units: 055 (Menominee), 122 (Norway), and 155 (Gladstone).

The production of mast (fruit and nuts) in the UP has been low throughout much of the region this year. There is some acorn and apple production but it is spotty throughout the region so hunters will need to scout in order to find these areas. Although mast production was low this year there was enough rain and heat to have a productive growing season giving deer many other food sources to seek out.

In general, hunters should expect to see fewer deer, especially in the younger age classes (fawns and yearlings). Always keep in mind that each area is influenced by local factors and conditions that affect deer density and sightings in that area. The largest bucks (heaviest and largest antlers) typically come from agricultural areas, but nice bucks are also taken from forested areas where access is limited and they have an opportunity to get older.

### **Northern Lower Peninsula**

The deer population for the Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP) is expected to be similar to last year. Even with the severe winter this past year deer in the NLP came through it in fair to good conditions.

Deer sightings have been good throughout the region and many have reported seeing healthy fawns including many sets of twins. Though it appears some deer may have been lost due to the severe winter the main impacts observed from winter will likely be smaller body size and antlers rather than lower populations.

Mast production (fruits and nuts) has been good throughout the region. High production of acorns, apples and beechnuts has been reported. Deer should be targeting these areas frequently. Scouting to find these areas will be very important. Contacting your local wildlife office may be a good first step; they may be able to give you insight as to which areas are producing.

Expect to see similar deer numbers to last year throughout most of the NLP. Many areas may see more 2.5 year old bucks this year as well since a number of NLP counties began a 3 point antler point restriction last year which allowed the majority of 1.5 year old bucks to mature to the next age class this year. All NLP Deer Management Units are open for antlerless hunting so be sure to look in the [2014 Antlerless Deer Digest](#) if you are interested in obtaining an antlerless license.

### **Southern Lower Peninsula**

Abundant food and cover in the form of agricultural crops and scattered swamps and woodlots provide very good habitat across the southern Michigan landscape. This high quality habitat, combined with relatively mild winter conditions, typically results in a more abundant and productive deer population compared to other regions of the state.

Over the last decade or more, deer population estimates and indices (including deer/vehicle collisions, crop damage complaints, and observations of deer by the hunting community and field staff) in the Southern Lower Peninsula have stabilized or declined. In many instances, reductions were intended to reduce conflicts that can occur when deer

populations are high, though the Department still desires to keep adequate deer for enjoyable hunting and viewing experiences. Repeated outbreaks of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD), however, have also occurred over this period. Though individual EHD outbreak sites affect deer at the scale of a township or smaller, these outbreaks have likely produced more variability in deer densities across southern Michigan than has occurred in many years. Populations in a number of locations are likely now at or closer to goal than they have been for some time and in some cases deer population should be increased. Management efforts are now being directed towards distinct areas at a smaller scale than larger, regional regulations and Deer Management Units that were formerly in place. Research is underway to improve understanding of the duration of EHD impacts that hunters and landowners should expect to see where outbreaks have occurred. Given the higher proportion of land in private ownership in this region, and the often small property sizes, the Department is working to find more ways to support good deer harvest and habitat management decisions among networks of private landowners and hunters.

## **Important Changes**

### **Multiple Year Regulations**

This will be Michigan's first cycle of multiple year deer regulations. The cycle will last three years in length, with the first occurring from 2014–2016. The goal of multi- year regulations is to establish consistency. This consistency will reduce confusion among hunters, give biologists the opportunity to evaluate the impacts that regulations are having, and provide more time for developing predictions and generating input on proposed new regulations. Regulations may still be changed within the cycle under emergency conditions – such as in response to a severe winter or disease outbreak – but the stability of a multi-year approach should be a benefit to hunters and wildlife managers alike.

### **New License Package**

In 2013 the Michigan Legislature passed a new license package that increased hunting and fishing license fees for the first time in over 15 years. These increases will help to increase conservation efforts across Michigan including increased habitat work, improvements to our retail sales system, promotion of Michigan's long tradition of hunting and fishing, and a greater number of Conservation Officers in the field. Under this new license structure there is no longer a single archery and single firearm license. Instead, there is a new **single deer license** valid throughout archery, firearm and muzzleloader seasons, or as an alternative there is a **deer combo license**, which includes two kill tags, one regular and one restricted. Hunters who want the opportunity to harvest two bucks must buy the deer combo license instead of the single deer license. An antlered deer harvested with the restricted tag of the deer combo license must have at least 4 antler points on one side, while the unrestricted tag is only subject to antler point restrictions in some individual Deer Management Units. See below, as well as pages 32 & 33 in the 2014 Hunting and Trapping Digest at [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting) for additional information. Antlerless licenses also continue to be available based on quotas established for each Deer Management Unit.

Among the most significant changes affecting deer hunters, a **base license** is now required for hunters of any game species. The purchase of a base license includes small game hunting privileges at a reduced price compared to previous years. Whether they choose to hunt small game or not, hunters' base license dollars will be used to enhance and expand hunting opportunities, which benefits hunters of all species. Deer hunters that may have overlooked small game hunting in the past should consider the benefits of scouting for a prime deer hunting spot while participating in the opportunity that now comes with your base license. For more information about deer licenses and the base license please refer to pages 8 and 31 in the [2014 Hunting and Trapping Digest](#).

### **Muzzleloading Season Day Opener Same Statewide**

A change to the Northern Lower Peninsula muzzleloading season opening day will now allow for the muzzleloading season to have the same opening day statewide. All three hunting zones will open the same day with zone 1 and zone 2 also closing the same day and zone 3 continuing for another week as it has in the past. For the exact dates please refer to page 8 of the [2014 Hunting and Trapping Digest](#).

### **Limited Firearm Deer Zone**

What was once known as the "Shotgun Zone" which encompassed nearly all of hunting zone 3 will now be known as the "Limited Firearm Deer Zone." The change in the name reflects a change made this year to the types of weapons that may be utilized in this zone. For exact rules and regulations regarding the weapon types please refer to page 20 in the [2014 Hunting and Trapping Digest](#).

### **DMU Boundaries for Southern Michigan**

A number of new Deer Management Unit (DMU) boundaries were established for Southern Michigan starting with the 2013 deer season. DMU 486, which formerly encompassed most of Hunting and Trapping Zone 3, was dissolved into several smaller DMUs. Most all DMUs follow county lines, though some consist of multi-county units. This is still the case in 2014, with the creation of only a single new DMU 312, consisting of Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, and Branch counties. Please consult the 2014 antlerless digest at: [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting) for more information.

### **Things to Consider for this Deer Hunting Season**

#### **Where to Hunt**

As any deer hunter knows deer are not stationary animals, they are constantly moving to new places and just as often, they are returning to familiar spots. Michigan's deer herd is no exception. It is spread out across the state and often, locally pocketed in areas with the best habitat and resources available. For this reason there is no better way to locate deer than by getting out on the landscape and scouting. Learning where this year's deer trails are, finding which oak trees are producing acorns and discovering where a group is bedding down each night are often the keys to a successful hunt. Michigan also offers a number of online interactive tools such Mi-HUNT, an interactive web application located at [www.michigan.gov/mihunt](http://www.michigan.gov/mihunt), to help you hone in on good habitat and potential hunting

spots. If you find yourself short on time these tools are an excellent way to save some time and narrow down your selection.

### **Consider Mentoring a Youth Hunter**

Shared experience with family and friends is one of the most cherished aspects of hunting. We encourage you to share that heritage with a young person in your life. Under the Mentored Youth Hunting Program it is possible to take a youth 9 or younger deer hunting. For specific program requirements please visit: [www.michigan.gov/mentoredhunting](http://www.michigan.gov/mentoredhunting)

### **Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger Program**

The Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger (MSAH) program is a wonderful way for hunters to share a part of their harvest this fall, or donate a whole deer. Since 1991, MSAH has been working to help connect donors, wild game processors and charities that feed needy individuals. Together, they have assembled a network of processors and charities to help channel wild game donations into the hands of those in need.

If interested in donating please contact your local field office. A list of field offices can be found at: [www.sportsmenagainsthunger.org](http://www.sportsmenagainsthunger.org).

### **Bring your Deer to a Checkstation**

Michigan has some of the best historical data on deer in the country. The data we gather at checkstations and from the hunter harvest surveys helps us to make future management decisions, monitor the health of the herd and the time spent talking with hunters is invaluable to field staff. You can be a part of this important aspect of deer management by bringing your deer or deer head to a checkstation, along with information about where and when the deer was taken. As always, you also receive a successful hunter deer management cooperator patch. For a list of deer checkstation locations and hours please visit: [www.michigan.gov/deer](http://www.michigan.gov/deer).

### **Antler Point Restrictions**

A number of different antler point restrictions, or APRs, have been implemented in Michigan in recent years, and other areas have received consideration for APRs. There are no new APR areas or regulations in Michigan for the 2014 season, and no proposals are currently being considered for implementation in the next few seasons. The new license package, however, does add some new considerations by simplifying how some existing APRs apply. Specifically, within the “Hunter’s Choice” APR areas of the Upper Peninsula and DMU 487 in the bovine tuberculosis zone, the **single deer license** is only subject to APRs in a few individual, smaller DMUs. Antlered deer taken in the “Hunter’s Choice” APR areas using the unrestricted tag of the **combo deer license** must have at least 3 antler points on one side. An antlered deer harvested anywhere within Michigan using the restricted tag of the **deer combo license** – including within the “Hunter’s Choice” APR areas – must have at least 4 antler points on one side.

See the 2014 Hunting and Trapping Digest at [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting) pages 32 & 33 for complete information on these regulations. You may also visit the APR Corner page located at [www.michigan.gov/deer](http://www.michigan.gov/deer) for more information and history on APRs in Michigan.

## **Wildlife Health Issues**

### **Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD)**

EHD has not been confirmed or reported anywhere in Michigan this year. Michigan EHD outbreaks were confirmed in 7 of the last 9 years, primarily in Southern Michigan. In some areas, deer populations are still recovering from past outbreaks. In 2012, deer die-offs from EHD occurred in 30 counties across the Lower Peninsula, with 14,898 deer reported dead. In 2013, laboratory confirmation only diagnosed EHD in 7 deer in 6 counties, with total losses likely only including several hundred deer. For more information on EHD, visit [www.michigan.gov/wildlifedisease](http://www.michigan.gov/wildlifedisease).

### **Bovine Tuberculosis (TB)**

In the northeast Lower Peninsula the prevalence of TB continues to be on a downward trend for the long term but has remained at the same levels in the population over the last seven years. Hunters are still strongly encouraged to harvest antlerless deer to help maintain reduced deer numbers and keep TB in check. Older antlered deer should also be harvested and are especially important to take to a check station, as these animals are more likely to contract TB. Bringing in a deer or deer head to a checkstation for testing allows us to track the prevalence of the disease in the population and is an integral part to eventually eradicating the disease.

In 2013 a dairy herd in Saginaw County tested positive for Bovine Tuberculosis. There is no evidence of TB in deer near this location, but it is important to continue to test deer in this area to accurately assess the situation.

We encourage anyone hunting in the following counties to please bring your deer head in for testing: Alcona, Alpena, Arenac, Bay, Cheboygan, Crawford, Genesee, Gratiot, Huron, Iosco, Midland, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle, Roscommon, and Saginaw.

For more information on these and other wildlife health issues go to: [www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases](http://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases).